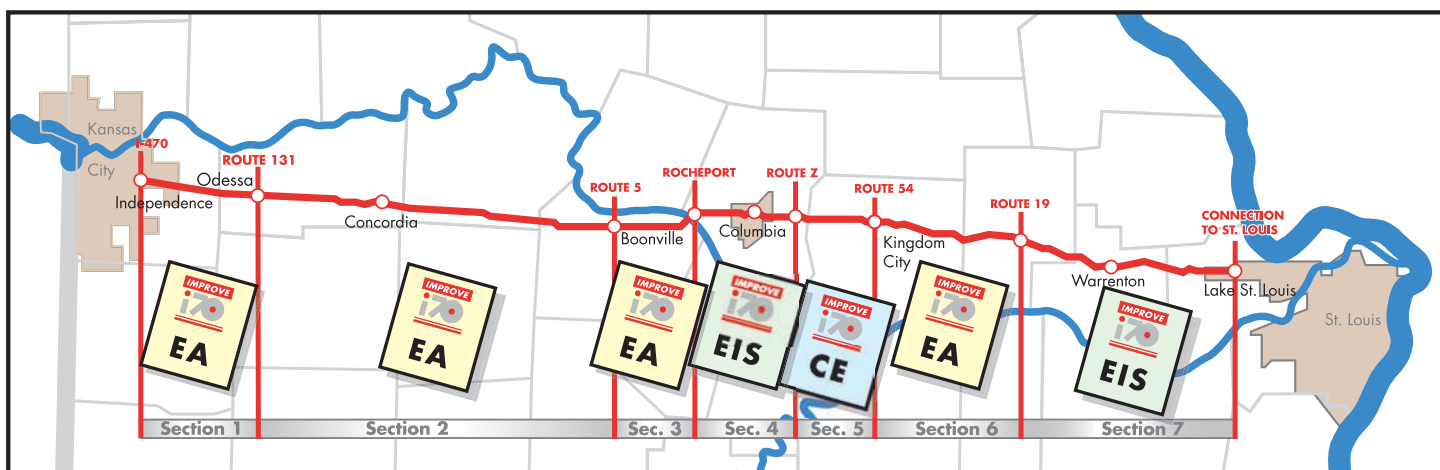




Reader's Guide

This informational guide is provided by the Missouri Department of Transportation to assist you in interpreting and evaluating documents produced for the Improve I-70 Studies. This guide answers some general questions about the documents and provides a brief overview of their contents.

Environmental Documents



What is an environmental document?

An environmental document is a public document that helps transportation-related agencies and the public make sound decisions about transportation investments. It provides in-depth analysis of the costs, benefits and impacts of a transportation improvement.

Seven environmental documents will be produced for I-70 to detail how improvements to the interstate could impact the natural and man-made environments. Each document will provide an evaluation of all the reasonable alternatives for widening and rebuilding I-70 and recommend a preferred alternative for that particular section of the route. Three types of environmental documents are being produced for the seven sections of I-70 being studied.

- *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* - An EIS is being produced for two areas where I-70 improvements are likely to have a significant environmental impact, requiring in-depth analysis and efforts to minimize those impacts.
- *Environmental Assessment (EA)* - An EA is being produced for four areas where the degree of environmental impact caused by I-70 improvements is uncertain and yet is expected to not be significant.
- *Documented Categorical Exclusion (CE)* - A CE is being produced for only one area of I-70 where no significant environmental impacts are expected.



What information is included in environmental documents?

Environmental documents include all of the important technical data collected and analyses conducted by the seven respective Improve I-70 study teams. While the documents might be organized slightly differently from section to section, they all will include the following basic information.

Summary

This part of the document provides an overall summary of the study and the document's contents. If you only read one section of the draft, read this one. The summary provides a concise overview of why the study was conducted, what was studied and how study teams arrived at their proposed conclusions.

Chapter 1 - Purpose and Need

This chapter provides a brief history of I-70, describes the specific study area and identifies the transportation problems that would be addressed by proposed improvements.

Chapter 2 - Alternatives

This chapter describes the alternatives, or options, considered for widening and rebuilding I-70, and how effective they are in addressing the problems defined in Chapter 1. The chapter also explains how those options were narrowed to a set of reasonable alternatives.

Chapter 3 - Affected Environment

This chapter describes the existing natural and man-made environments within the study area. The chapter includes population statistics, demographics and information about prime farmland, wetlands, lakes, rivers, parklands, geological features such as caves and mines, historical or culturally sensitive areas and threatened and endangered species.

Chapter 4 - Environmental Consequences

This part of the document, which is sometimes combined within Chapter 3, presents both the adverse and beneficial impacts to the affected environment. This allows the reader to compare the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the reasonable alternatives. It also explains how the reasonable alternatives were narrowed to the recommended preferred alternative.

Chapter 5 - Comments and Coordination

This chapter summarizes the public involvement and agency coordination activities carried out over the course of the study. It also provides a summary of public input gathered through meetings and other events, the telephone hot line, project Web site and email and postal addresses.

Section 4(f)

Some documents could include a chapter titled "Section 4(f)." This name refers to a portion of federal law mandating that special efforts be made to preserve public parks and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges and significant historic sites. If any of those assets are impacted by the selected I-70 improvements, it must be shown that: (1) there is no prudent and feasible alternative to avoid the asset; and (2) all possible efforts will be made to minimize harm.

List of Preparers

The document will provide a list of personnel who were primarily responsible for preparing the draft version.

Circulation List

This list identifies those who will receive a copy of the draft document for review and comment. It also identifies locations where the draft will be available for public viewing.

Appendix A - First Tier Summary

Each document will contain the same information within Appendix A: a summary of the First Tier Study of I-70. That study, completed in December 2001, determined that widening and reconstructing I-70 along its existing route was the best course of action for the future.

Other Appendices

These will vary from document to document, but Appendices B, C, D and so on will include a variety of information such as maps, tables, numerical data and meeting summaries. See the document's table of contents for a listing of appendix titles.

Why are environmental documents produced?

Environmental documents are required by the federal government for transportation improvement projects that will use federal funds and/or federal permits for construction. But far beyond that requirement, I-70 documents also help state and federal agencies and local communities make well-informed decisions about the future of the interstate. The documents will describe how a community or area might change as a result of I-70 improvements, and in that way, will help you form opinions about which improvement alternative you prefer.

Additionally, environmental documents give you the same information used by the Missouri Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration in selecting a preferred alternative for I-70. This full disclosure helps you see the basis on which decisions are made. Each document will answer the following basic questions:

- ***What is the purpose and need for the improvement?***
Why is the study being conducted? This is the problem definition.
- ***How might the improvement impact the natural environment?*** For example, how would building improvements to I-70 impact wetlands or threatened and endangered species? Would the project impact air quality or the quality of rivers and streams?
- ***How might the improvement impact the cultural and social environments?*** How would I-70 improvements impact historical and archaeological sites, public recreation lands like state parks, access to jobs, schools, shopping and other services, the local economy, land use and community cohesion? Are economically disadvantaged groups disproportionately affected?
- ***How would the proposed improvement function?***
How much traffic would it carry? How much would it cost to construct and maintain? Would it address the identified problems adequately?

What's the process for document review and approval?

Federal and state guidelines and policies direct the process of developing, reviewing and approving environmental documents. The process for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and an Environmental Assessment (EA) includes the following steps.



Draft Document Distribution and Comment Period

First, a draft version of the environmental impact statement (DEIS) or environmental assessment (DEA) is approved for circulation by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Afterwards the document is circulated to a variety of state and federal agencies and public officials for their review, and at the same time, is made available for public review at a variety of locations such as libraries and government buildings and on the project Web site. Anyone can review and comment on the draft during a specified period that lasts at least 45 days for an EIS and at least 30 days for an EA. The official comment period will be well publicized for each document.

Where can I review documents

The Missouri Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration want to ensure that the widest possible audience has the opportunity to review and comment on draft environmental documents. To ensure this, several opportunities for review and comment will be provided.

On the Web

All draft documents will be provided on the Web site, www.ImproveI70.org. Visitors to the site will be able to view the document, download its contents and submit comments online.



At Public Viewing Locations

All draft documents will be available at a variety of public locations within each section of I-70. Generally, these will include libraries, government buildings and other locations with easy

public access. A listing of public review locations can be found within the draft document, on the project Web site at www.ImproveI70.org, or you may call 1-800-590-0066 to determine a specific location.

and how can I submit comments?

At Public Hearings

Public hearings will provide the opportunity to review the document, discuss its contents with a member of the study team and provide your comments for the official study record. Hearings will be well publicized and details about the date, time and location will be posted on the project Web site.

Through the Mail or Online

You may mail your comments to Improve I-70, P.O. Box 410482, Kansas City, MO, 64141-0482 or send them electronically to: comments@ImproveI70.org.



Remember, each document will have an official review period during which time your comments must be submitted.



Official Public Hearing

About three weeks after the draft document has been available for review, an official public hearing will be held to gather citizen's comments. Hearings will likely be in an open-house format, allowing you to come and go at any time. Copies of the document, along with display boards, maps and other information will be available, and study team members will be on-hand to answer your questions and address your concerns. Comment forms will be available and court reporters will be provided to transcribe your verbal comments. All written and transcribed comments made at the hearing, and any other written comments received during the official comment period will become a part of the official study record.



Final Document Development

After the official review period ends, the study team will review all comments submitted by the public and government review agencies and begin work on the final version of their document – Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) or Final Environmental Assessment (FEA). Substantive comments (see the questions and answers above) are responded to in writing and in the final document. The final document is basically an update of the draft and includes those substantive comments and the results of any additional evaluations or analyses performed in response to the comments gathered.

How are these documents different from the *First Tier Environmental Impact Statement*?

The First Tier EIS considered the needs of the entire I-70 corridor between Independence and Lake St. Louis and evaluated several corridor-wide improvement strategies. While environmental documents for the Improve I-70 studies will be similar in structure and basic content, they will provide much greater detail on how changes caused by the reasonable alternatives for I-70 could impact specific areas. Documents will also suggest how best to avoid, minimize or mitigate those impacts.

Can I get my own copy?

You can get a copy of the draft documents several ways. You may download documents from the project Web site at www.ImproveI70.org, or you can copy portions of the documents at public viewing locations where copy facilities are available. For the convenience of others, it is requested that the documents not be taken or borrowed from their viewing locations. You may also request a paper copy of the document or a copy on CD-ROM by calling the project hot line at 1-800-590-0066.

Why is the Section 5 document different?

In Section 5, proposed I-70 improvements will be explained in a Documented Categorical Exclusion (CE). This type of document is used when improvements are not expected to cause significant impacts to the surrounding environment. Section 5 includes mainly rural, un-developed land with few natural environmental features or habitats, and widening is proposed directly adjacent to the existing highway. Although the study process includes the same rigorous data collection, analysis and public involvement efforts as in other sections, this type of documentation is appropriate given the environmental and social character of Section 5. The CE will be made available to the public in the same way as other sections, and study team personnel will be present to address public questions and concerns at hearings in Sections 4 and 6.

What is a ***SUBSTANTIVE*** comment?

"I don't want this highway there" is a comment. "I don't want this highway there because there is an old family cemetery there" is a substantive comment. Substantive comments place a fact on the table that must be addressed. Should you only submit substantive comments? Absolutely not. Your opinion matters and you should express it. Only substantive comments receive a formal response, but ALL comments are documented and reviewed by the study team.

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Final Document Distribution

Copies of the final document are provided to the same state and federal agencies, public officials and public locations that received the draft. The final document will confirm the preferred alternative and will serve as the basis for future actions related to I-70 improvements.



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Document Approval

The Federal Highway Administration has responsibility for approving all environmental documents for I-70. After final versions are circulated, the agency will publish a Record of Decision (ROD) for Environmental Impact Statements, and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for Environmental Assessments. These approvals announce the selected alternative for I-70 improvements which can proceed to the next phases of development – design, right of way acquisition and construction. These next phases are dependent on funding. Please be advised that no funding has yet been authorized for design, right-of-way acquisition or construction of major I-70 improvements.

How will I be informed about documents and hearings?

Postcard notices with details about document availability and public hearings will be sent to all those on the Improve I-70 mailing list (if you received this guide by mail, you're on the list). This information will also be detailed in upcoming issues of *Momentum* (the Improve I-70 newsletter), through news releases sent to local media and through legal notices published in area newspapers. All these activities will take place several weeks before official hearings are held to provide ample time for the public to review draft environmental documents.

Where can I get more information about Improve I-70?

The Improve I-70 Web site includes a wealth of information about MoDOT's efforts to plan for the future of this vital interstate. There you'll find background information on why the current studies are being conducted and a history of the decisions that preceded them. You'll also find answers to frequently asked questions and facts about important issues like trucks, noise and funding. Videos and other graphics on the site illustrate how I-70 might look in the future, and maps in the "local focus" section show the I-70 improvements that have been considered. You are encouraged to visit the site at **www.ImproveI70.org** to learn more. If you have questions about information you find on the site, contact us at 1-800-590-0066.

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